The Global Novel and Capitalism in Crisis

Contemporary Literary Narratives

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New Comparisons in World Literature

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New Comparisons in World Literature offers a fresh perspective on one of the most exciting current debates in humanities by approaching ‘world literature’ not in terms of particular kinds of reading but as a particular kind of writing. We take ‘world literature’ to be that body of writing that registers in various ways, at the levels of form and content, the historical experience of capitalist modernity. We aim to publish works that take up the challenge of understanding how literature registers both the global extension of ‘modern’ social forms and relations and the peculiar new modes of existence and experience that are engendered as a result. Our particular interest lies in studies that analyse the registration of this decisive historical process in literary consciousness and affect.

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To Andy Mullen, my co-conspirator.

Do Colm Ó Ceallaigh—muiinteoir, údar, agus Daideo.
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Arundhati Roy, in Capitalism: A Ghost Story (2014), states that “Capitalism is going through a crisis whose gravity has not revealed itself yet” (p. 45). Roy’s diagnosis of capitalism’s fault lines—of wealth hoarding, environmental toxification, falling growth rates, and increasing strikes—is unusual in its maximal overview of capitalism’s weaknesses, presenting a complex but compound series of cascading ecological and economic crises. Yet many accounts of capitalism-in-crisis have not attended to its longue durée, regional differentiation or cognisance that capitalism is the process and gravitational field through which environments are organised, labour commodified, and imperialism funded. Likewise, Marxist postcolonial scholar Timothy Brennan eschews a renewed fascination with the novelty of crisis, of its “epistemic breaks,” ‘Copernican revolutions,’ and ‘historical ruptures’” (2014, p. 11), noting instead that “a political break can be affected as much by historical continuities as by ruptures”, or in Marx’s famous formulation that history occurs first as tragedy then as farce (2004, p. 85).

That contemporary financial systems are too complex for even neoliberal technocrats to understand is a symptom, prima facie, of algorithmic convolutions, but also the almost sublime nature of global capitalism, and the difficulties involved in imagining a longue durée world-system structured by repeated cycles and speculative busts, especially
in a period of economic decline and hegemonic transition. This general “cultural debility” (Mirowski 2013, p. 12), or the unimaginable totality of capitalism, is a consequence for Fredric Jameson of the “ugly and bureaucratic representational qualifications” (2009c, p. 608) of a world that conditions its own horizons of understandings, and that finds its own demise incomprehensible.

This monograph is concerned with how with a combined crisis of capitalism is likewise registered in disciplinary and representational terms as an incapacity to narrate totality, alongside a dissatisfaction with postcolonial literary modes, and an attempt to “make real” capitalist globalisation and its worsening situation. Global fictions are here differentiated against world literature given the latter’s emergence from comparative literary studies and emphasis on “great works” of art. In contrast, global literature emerged from the massification of postcolonial literary studies, taking its germinal thematic focus from discussions of “after empire” while deploying transnational and deterritorialised narratives that mobilise postcolonial tropes such as “hybridity, diaspora, transculturation, subaltern, hegemony, deterritorialization, rhizome, mestizo, Eurocentrism and othering” (Gunn 2001, p. 18; see also O’Brien and Szeman 2001, p. 605). However, for O’Brien and Szeman, editors of a special issue on “The Globalization of Fiction/The Fiction of Globalization” (2001), it “does not really make sense to search for a literature of globalization—for texts that explicitly thematize the processes of globalization—any more than it does to search for particularly explicit examples of postcolonial literature” (p. 610) due to the breadth of globalisation’s definition as a mode of economic expansion, cultural homogenisation, and synonym for American dominance. But despite this critique global literatures can be negatively defined: unlike postcolonial studies and its concern with the socio-political legacies of empire, anti-colonisation movements, and institutional canonicity, the global novel unevenly registers the nation as an important category, has expansive geographical horizons, a long historical scale, and often thematises its leave-taking of postcolonial aesthetics and concerns while being “born translated” (Walkowicz 2015) for a global literary audience based in Northern metropoles. Studies of global fictions are eclectic, focusing on the circulation and production of literary forms, or in studies of American narratives of consumption (Annesley 2006); in warnings about the reproduction of America in “global” works that manufacture the local “as the world” (Brennan 2001, p. 661), or as Baucom ponders whether “Expansion contracts; contraction enriches” (2001, p. 169);
or of globalisation as simply a long-standing, even ancient, consensual exchange of ideas, goods and people that expands literature’s horizons of possibility (Gunn 2001, p. 20; Israel 2004, pp. 2–3). What most of these accounts share is an emphasis on the role hegemonic regions like North America and Europe still play in consecrating and disseminating such literatures; and how this reproduces American or “global northern” literary works as the “world”.

But for Gikandi postcolonial literature’s global thrust gained currency exactly because of its emphasis on mobility and migrancy, a turn that risked ignoring an “other, darker, older narrative of poverty, of failed nationalism, of death, that will simply not go away” (2001, p. 639). Taking heed of such warnings, this monograph’s conceptual apparatus is perversely not drawn from the same postcolonial ground from whence global literature emerged: such an approach would merely confirm the ongoing circulation and cachet of particular “postcolonial” tropes, like a scepticism towards socialist post-independence nation-states, a privileging of modernist stylistics, and a recirculation of questions of transnational belonging. The body of global works examined here by Salman Rushdie, David Mitchell, Rana Dasgupta, and Rachel Kushner, focused as intently as they are on post-colonial disenchantment, frictionless global circulation, and US empire, seem not to have much to say about the postcolonial as a body of critically urgent work that reclaims, as Bhagat Kennedy argues, “cultural, economic, and political sovereignty” (2018, p. 335). Compare the lively and sustained engagement with questions of postcolonial style, national development, and political possibility in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), against the cosmopolitan deterritorialisation of his global rock epic *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), the planetary coincidences and historical compression of Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* (2009), or US empire as a cipher for desire and repulsion in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). Rather this monograph finds fecund critical ground in materialist world-literary studies that bring together world-systems theory, Marxist postcolonial approaches, and “second wave” ecocriticism, to examine the narrative strategies of modes of realism and narratives of globalisation, conditioned as they are by “rational” attunements to capitalist reality, amidst a flattening of national differences, the diminishment of political possibilities, and imaginaries that tend to figure the end of the world sooner than the end of late capitalism (Jameson 2009b, p. 50).

To return to the idea of “disciplinary” crises, a recent turn in world-literary studies towards historical capitalism rather than strictly colonialism emerged in part because of the omissions of postcolonial studies to
account for the period of post-independence as one of continued asset-stripping through structural readjustment: or the new financial mechanisms by which formally colonised nation-states experienced shock integrations into the world-system, involving intensified rounds of privatisation, deregulation, and a collapse in subsistence economies, in ways that maintained ongoing structurally disadvantageous positions, or the status quo of core-periphery dynamics (Lazarus 2011, pp. 7–9; see also Brennan 2004; Lazarus 2004; Parry 2004a). A materialist world-literary theory thus responds to a perceived difficulty or conceptual incapacity in the field of postcolonial studies to grapple with a situation that exceeds anti-colonial temporalities or conditions and demands a new critical language to parse the complex and ongoing oppressions of an uneven world-system, rather than an over-determined use of the “postcolonial”. Such work takes capitalism as the “interpretive horizon” of literature (Brown 2005, p. 1), with the spread of European colonialism and capitalism producing a “baseline of universality” (p. 2) of experiences and sensories throughout the world. Most notably the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), marry Brown’s insights with Moretti’s account of the “one, and unequal” world-literary system (Moretti 2004, p. 149; WReC 2015, pp. 7–9), and Fredric Jameson’s equation of modernity to “world-wide capitalism” (2002, p. 12), to describe their method as an analysis of “the literature of the modern capitalist world-system […] modernity is both what world-literature indexes or is ‘about’ and what gives world-literature its distinguishing formal characteristics” (p. 15). For such critics, world-literary analyses involve reading for the formal disjunctions of fictions that register the alienating affects of capitalist modernity, especially in the peripheries and semi-peripheries of the world-system, where the violence of appropriation is most visibly expressed. Taking on the precepts of world-systems theory thus means attending to the longue durée of a system that is a world-economy, or to paraphrase Immanuel Wallerstein, an economy that is a world unto itself, with capitalism’s recurring hegemonic long-waves and economic cycles the major structuring logic of modernity. Secondly, world-systems theory’s tripartite scheme of core/periphery/semi-periphery restructures the global economy according to differential logics of accumulation, rather than the temporalising effect of the “post” in postcolonial, with peripheries areas of resource extraction and cheap labour, semi-peripheries those regions where prices for labour and raw material are calculated, and core regions where wealth is hoarded, and cultural capital bestowed anew.\(^5\)
In the context of this theoretical shift, postcolonial literary studies is reappraised as a “pragmatic adjustment to the demise of the socialist-communist emancipatory movements that swept across the Third World and flourished during the ‘Bandung’ years” (Lazarus 2011, p. 9). The shift in postcolonial energies from anti-imperialist political movements after the end of World War II, towards the subsumption of anti-colonial energies following the advent of neoliberalism, occurred during what world-systems theorist Wallerstein describes as the “first bifurcation” (2011, p. 156) of the world-economy. Although the global protests of 1968 were generally against capitalism and US imperialism, they also marked the moment in which many anti-systemic movements were rejected, including “social-democrats in the West, the Communist parties in the socialist bloc, the national liberation movements in the Third World” (Wallerstein 2011, p. 157). The defeat of postcolonial liberation movements through mechanisms like Structural Adjustment Programs that compelled peripheral and post-Soviet states to adjust to “‘normal’ capitalism” (Amin 1997, p. 13), also corresponded with a “sea change” (Lazarus 2004, p. 4) in the 1980s in postcolonial theory, (not just the political-economic resistance movements of the post-colonial era), with a formal approach to culture allowing scholars a detachment from social concerns, and “‘an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history’” (Said qtd. Parry 2004a, p. 4). The “exciting play of an infinite self-fashioning” (Brennan 2004, p. 138) of postcolonial literary theory after its institutionalisation in the academy led it to privilege migration, cosmopolitanism, and mobility as virtuous traits in terms that accorded with the consensual, transnational ideals of capitalist globalisation (see Dirlik 1994). This included its hostility to the nation-state and its sense of having “moved past colonialism and imperialism” (Brennan 2004, p. 138), which culminated in the post-1989 position that “socialism itself was pronounced dead and buried” (Lazarus 2004, p. 5). For Said postcolonialism had become a “misnomer” (2002, p. 2) against the continuing effects of neo-colonial technics, and “structures of dependency and impoverishment”.

For contemporary critics of postcolonial literary studies, its focus on “imperialism rather than capitalism” (Deckard 2015, p. 239) is symptomatic of an “end of history” aporia and dismissal of alternate political histories, in which capitalism is an invisible cause, about which little can be said, rendering postcolonial studies insufficient as a method for fathoming the conditions by which peripheral nations have been further structurally...
disadvantaged (Bernard et al. 2015, p. 6; Lazarus 2011, p. 17). This critique of postcolonial studies as seemingly reluctant and incapable of identifying the structural nature of previous and ongoing (neo)colonialisms began to emerge in the early 1990s. Anne McClintock, in a well-known article, targeted the production of postcolonialism as a marketable and non-threatening field of study (1992, p. 93) that ignored the uneven and diverse reality of postcolonial conditions and politics (p. 87), including the funding of ecological extraction and economic devaluing by the World Bank and IMF (p. 95). Arif Dirlik similarly noted how textualist studies privileged heterogeneous, local, and subjective forms of experience or a “politics of location” (1994, p. 336) that displaced anti-imperialist politics with questions of epistemic instability and the fragmentation of the body politic, with Aijaz Ahmad sensationally remarking that such approaches risked producing the “death of politics” (1992, p. 65). The post-Soviet age was not one of “postcolonialism but of intensified colonialism” (Miyoshi 1993, p. 750) even though it had a different aspect to previous moments of imperialism and used new technologies of profiteering and expansion.

What was required was a new conceptual framework, not simply a vocabulary shift, to evaluate how colonial relations did not precede capitalist modernity, but were in fact animated by it. Since the US’ invasion of Iraq sharper questions have emerged regarding postcolonial theory as a means of historicising and critiquing new forms of imperialism, albeit drawing on older narratives of imperial rise and fall, like that of ancient Rome (Loomba et al. 2005, p. 1). Another attempt to name conditions of imperial power arose in Amitava Kumar’s anthology on “World Bank Literature”, in which he calls for a “different protocol of reading” (2003, p. xix) to imagine the vast causes by which local quixotic responses to national economic downturns are connected with decisions taken by multinational institutions like the World Bank. Although Kumar’s anthology eschews the lessons of world-systems theory, its attempt to link local malaises with transnational economic systems is symptomatic of the disciplinary challenges and theoretical aporias of postcolonial theory. Concurrently, emergent theories of postcolonial-ecocriticism sought to examine the intertwined nature of political and ecological injustice in terms that would illuminate intensified forms of ecological extraction committed globally (Mukherjee 2010, p. 6). 8

Materialist world-literary theories, most noticeably that of the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), provide a vital strand in this
renewal of Marxist thought, with the collective arguing that the horizons of the literary unconscious are always those of global capitalism and that the “world-system exists unforgoably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape and comes into being” (2015, p. 20) to different degrees of criticality and reflection. A cohort of affiliated scholars extends the implications of this work to argue for worlded eco-materialist approaches that consider capitalism not only as an economic system, but as a world-ecology—or how capitalist expansion is both fuelled by the appropriation of nature’s “free gifts”, but also forcibly alters and locks regional socio-ecologies into global systems. This includes Michael Niblett’s approach which takes Jason W. Moore’s capitalist world-ecology as world-literature’s “interpretive horizon” (2012, p. 20); Kerstin Oloff’s historicisation of the Caribbean gothic in relation to ecological revolutions, from colonial plantations to US imperialism (2012); or Sharae Deckard on the aesthetic registration of monocrops from cacao to tea (2017). What differentiates this field from more “traditional” world-literary studies concerned with translation and reading practices is an urgency around reading for social and environmental injustice, and the presumption of culture’s oppositional force in navigating and making understandable vast and often unimaginably global processes. This careful attention to politics, power, and form makes this body of materialist world-literary thought a critical and necessary one for reading for global fiction’s registration of compound and terminal crises of capitalism.

**Part II: Literature and Crisis**

If the emergence of postcolonial literary studies in the 1970s and 1980s offers a practical accommodation to the demise of radical socialism through a detached analysis of empire, subjectivity, and form, then global fictions appear towards the end of the millennium as the “late-stage” consequence of friction-free globalisation, and an effervescent Clintonian-era utopian investment in notions of cosmopolitan belonging and “in-between” migrant identities. Global literature often eschews or quickly passes over anti-colonial struggles and politics and is often written in a “post-national” vein in mass literary works that encode the easy transnational mobility and spritely planetary viewpoint of a literature that reproduces the ambition of globalisation in its narrative structure, character movements, and plot progressions. Consider David Mitchell’s multi-story
country-hopping *Ghostwritten* (1999), or Alex Garland’s *The Tesseract* (1998), one of the earlier examples of a global novel that telescopes meaning through a fragmented narrative form, or the “tesseract” which operates aptly as a metaphor for capitalism as “a thing you are not equipped to understand. You can only understand the tesseract [. . .] We can see the thing unravelled, but not the thing itself” (2007, p. 249). The idea of the tesseract as something that can only be seen through its dissolution or trace is dangerously suggestive of the perpetual deferment of meaning of “post” theories, but finds usefulness as a metaphor for the vast networks that now constitute lived experience and which can only be observed through their epiphenomenal affects.

Conditioning the emergence of global fictions is a concern with recovering agency and causality through richly researched and imagined multi-site historical fictions: this includes carefully patterned histories of colonialism and post-independence criminal capitalism in Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995), Bulgarian and Georgian communist and post-Soviet transnationalism in Rana Dasgupta’s *Solo* (2009), or Rachel Kushner’s Amazon-New York-Italy interlinks in *The Flamethrowers* (2013). The impetus for these globally interlinked historical works is to consider what a history of the present might look like when financial volatility, resource scarcity, and geopolitical conflict, crowd out future political imaginings. Despite the originary differences between global and world fictions, one from postcolonial literatures, the other from comparative studies, they are now more than ever often spoken of in the same vein—an obvious consequence of the globalising thrust of contemporary works, and the circulation of fiction. But it is also worth, given these conceptual slippages, considering what world literature can teach us about global fictions given that its emergence and contemporary popularity is linked to economic crisis.

The editors of a recent special issue on “Global Crises And Twenty-First-Century World Literature” (Hansong and Wojno-Owczarska 2018), rightly note that Marx and Engel’s “The Communist Manifesto” (1848) was written under the shadow of labour disruptions, food riots, economic depression, and political revolution (pp. 245–246). World literature’s conceptualisation, from Goethe to Auerbach, is always presented as a potential salve to the “crises” of national parochialism, and a symptom of the internationalisation of economy and culture. Goethe’s meditations on world literature are described by Martin Puchner as “a solution to the dilemma” he “faced as a provincial intellectual caught between
metropolitan domination and nativist nationalism” (2017); Marx and Engels’ world literature emerged during an expansive phase of financial capitalist-colonialism in tension with the immiseration of Europe’s proletarian classes and the globalisation of emancipatory revolts; and Auerbach’s that of a post-World War II desire to unite a broken Europe. These crises are articulated at different levels—the personal, social, political, national—and with varied outcomes, and in contemporary revisions are removed from a consideration of how they may interrelate to world-systemic crises which also take discrete forms (overaccumulation, financial over-extension, scarcity), and manifest differently depending on one’s positionality in relation to the world-economy. Put differently, the cosmopolitan and humanist ambition of Goethe’s world literature, or the interlinking of globalisation with novel cultural habits for Marx and Engels are not deterministically tied to world-economic flows, but always operate as “structures of feeling” or what Raymond Williams defines as the residual, emergent, and dominant aspects of social change, which are variously registered in aesthetic, thematic, critical, and conceptual terms.

Fredric Jameson’s “political unconscious” (1981) offers a different way into this issue. Rather than saying tout court that world literature is itself a “crisis mode of cultural production” (Hansong and Wojno-Owczarska 2018, p. 246) dealing with a variety of issues “From epidemics to political scams and scandals, climate change to species extinction, financial crashes to terrorism” (p. 246), or the global novel as a means of narrating the “‘War on Terror,’ the 2008 financial crash, the European ‘migrant crisis,’ and U.S./Mexico border politics” (Anam 2019), we may ask how it is that narrative conventions and literary modes like realism, modernism, or world-historical narratives stabilise and mould how we apprehend crisis, particularly if our current conjuncture is one of hegemonic transition and world-economic decline. For Jameson literary forms sediment traces of older narrative forms and modes of production, while staging within itself social contradictions, like history’s “absent causality” and totality’s appearance in parts. Crises are mediated through inherited literary modes and presuppositions that can maintain, limit, challenge, and/or expand our apprehension of the nature of these events, and these are registered differently according to the conditions within which literary works emerge.

More specifically, if the current moment is one of disciplinary and representational transformations, what is the broader nature of the economic or ecological crises to which many of these theories and works respond?
For environmental historian Jason W. Moore, world-systems theorist Giovanni Arrighi, and Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson, there are two overarching forms of capitalist crisis. Firstly, capitalism’s normative condition depends upon constant crises of, for example, resource and energy scarcity to produce discursive and material justifications to overcome barriers to accumulation and expand into new commodity frontiers. Capitalism develops, as Jameson notes, like a “spiral” which is “discontinuous but expansive” mutating into “a larger sphere of activity and a wider field of penetration, of control, investment and transformation” (2009a, p. 139). These are called cyclical and developmental crises and are expressions of the “maturing contradictions inscribed in those regimes of value, power, and nature that govern capitalism over the longue durée, and through successive long centuries of accumulation” (Moore 2014, p. 290). This notion of “normative” and cyclical crises glosses Marx’s differentiation of contradictions, of overproduction or financial speculation, or what Paul Mason describes as the “major phenomena of the twentieth century” that complicate accumulation—of “state capitalism, monopolies, complex financial markets and globalization” (Mason 2015, p. 54). What interests us here are not the finely drawn differences between accumulative cycles or institutional pressures, but rather how culture narrates developmental crises, through say, the consideration of historical colonialism and contemporary capitalism as proximal processes, or in the reappearance of neo-Malthusian narratives of consumption and scarcity.

Secondly, a key focus of this monograph is how contemporary global literatures register insurmountable and epochal crises of capitalism perhaps not seen since the advent of early-modern capitalism. Recent accounts of capitalism-in-crisis speak to the singularity of the current moment, to the intensity of overaccumulation cycles, and ecocidal effects, which are hindering social reproduction. For Moore, the epochal nature of the current conjuncture emanates precisely from capitalism’s exhaustion of nature. Capitalism is not just an economic system, but is an ecological regime or a “world-ecology”, which confronted with climate change, increasing environmental toxicity and dwindling resources, is now facing a terminal failure of reproduction. However, capitalism, having extended across the globe and into every aspect of social relations and ecological life now has nowhere else to expand and no new frontiers to exploit. Rising labour, material, and resource prices cannot be fixed by future rounds of accumulation by dispossession, and the only frontiers left on the globe to colonise are ever more difficult, costly, and dangerous to explore. As
Moore remarks “The zeitgeist of the twenty-first century is therefore understandably infused with a sense of urgency”, as anthropogenic pressures push “the conditions of biospheric stability—climate and biodiversity above all—to the breaking point” (2016, p. 1).

However, this is not to fall into the trap of proclaiming yet again that the humanities is a field in crisis, itself a well-worn space-clearing gesture that assures the critical novelty of the weary (early career stage) academic. Uniting the contemporary preponderance of world, postcolonial and global critical studies is, WReC argues, a maximalist emphasis on disciplinary connections, and “commonality, linkage and connection, articulation and integration, network and system” (2015, p. 6). Disciplinary territorialism, rather than structural thinking, no longer offers a productive path forward in a current moment in which questions of uneven development, precarity, and environmental degradation are increasingly at the forefront of cultural critique and “state of the world” pronouncements.

**Part III: The Global Novel: Overview**

Crucially moments of crisis are “difficult to understand, interpret, and act upon” given that they are always pre-mediated and understood by already existing sets of narrative strategies, presuppositions, and concepts (Moore 2016, p. 1). Crisis is an integral aspect of capitalism’s structure, of its repeated “signal” or developmental crises, and as prefiguring its terminal disease, and scaling the macro-economic to the textual means examining how structural crises may present in disciplinary and representational terms. *The Global Novel* focuses on works by Salman Rushdie, David Mitchell, Rana Dasgupta, and Rachel Kushner that take the world as their horizon of understanding and seek the causal forces by which agency is eroded and history shaped. The methodology deployed here is developmental—tracing the emergence of recent narratives of crisis—and comparative, by examining texts which are set in a variety of places among them, Mumbai, London, Lagos, New York, Paris, Ulaanbaatar, and Tbilisi. Drawing on materialist, world-systems and world-ecological theories by Arrighi, Jameson, Lukács, and Moore, this monograph initially argues for a critical transition from postcolonial concerns and theories to world-systemic ones, arguing that this shift is due to the urgency and global scope of contemporary economic and ecological crises that exceed national or postcolonial paradigms. This is followed by four chapters that track a cumulative shift in the emergence and varied manifestations of the global novel. This includes firstly, the transition from postcolonial-poststructuralist aesthetics to transnational concerns through
Rushdie’s later fictions; the emergence of deterritorialised and expansive “northern” narratives in Mitchell’s global fictions; followed by Rana Das-gupta’s world-systemic and fractured story cycles; completed by Rachel Kushner’s world-historical, US empire novels.

Notably, all of the texts examined here are Anglophone fictions, or novels written in English. The “global Anglophone” now largely circulates as a misnomer on the academic job market for catch-all roles that involve the study and teaching of African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, Latin American, South Asian, East Asian, or European literatures in translation, and sometimes involving competency in more than one language (Srinivasan 2018; Anam 2019). That “world” and “global” job roles bracket the rest of the world as “other” in the teaching of English literature departments is tied to the contrary politics of “diversifying” curricula, the uncomfortable uncertainty over the usefulness of categories like “Commonwealth”, “Third World” and latterly, “postcolonial” (Srinivasan 2018, p. 309), and simultaneously of neutralising the specificity of area studies approaches. This monograph does not intervene in these discussions, but it is an easy logical move to argue that the “global novel” and its corollary job role both suffer from the effects of “world” literatures as a commodity to be briefly sampled on representative modules. The global also offers, as Anam argues, “a means of thinking beyond the presumption of discrete, extractable literary traditions that seems to mark many discussions of World Literature” (2019)—or a disaggregation of the regional knowledge and language specialisation of world literatures—an effect of transformations in humanities teaching, or of reduced staff, research funding, and a creeping parochialism.

To this, we should add that global literatures in English can be usefully defined as a recent phenomenon, as a mass literary category of world-hopping fictions that is not reducible to a literary offshoot of globalisation but rather is in a position, due to its thematic scale, wide distribution, and unique combination of commercialisation and politicisation, to capture the kinds of ideologies, politics, and narrative forms at work in narrating the world—a different argument to those that argue that global and/or world literatures in English are somehow separate to comparative literature, as though one was the unserious mass-market bedfellow to the other more proper object of study. These four authors are in receipt of prestigious literary prizes, and much has been made elsewhere about their reception and consecration by the academy as examples of postcolonial,